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SALT II: The Path of Security and Peace

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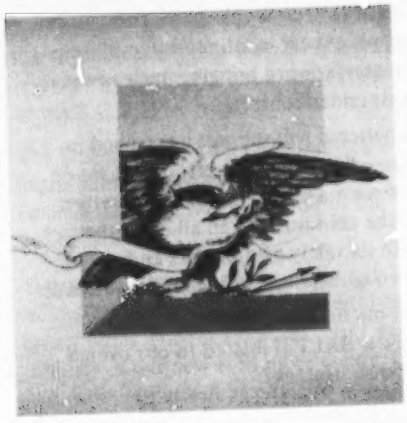

Address by President Carter to the American Newspaper Publishers Association, New York, April 25, 1979.

I want, first of all, to commend and endorse the theme of this convention: the defense of the first amendment of our Constitution and the freedom of the press. Liberty of expression is our most important civil right, and freedom of the press is its most important bulwark. We can never afford to grow complacent about the first amendment. On the contrary, you and I and others must actively protect it always.

The American press has grown enormously since the nation's early days—not only in its size and breadth but in its concepts of its own duties and its own responsibilities. The highest of these duties is to inform the public on the important issues of the day. And no issue is more important than the one I want to discuss with you today in a solemn and somber and sincere way—the control of nuclear arms.

Each generation of Americans faces a choice that defines our national character, a choice that is also important for what it says about our own nation's outlook toward the world. In the coming months, we will almost certainly be faced with such a choice: whether to accept or to reject a new strategic arms limitation treaty. The decision we make will profoundly affect our lives—and the lives of people all over the world—for years to come.

We face this choice from a position of strength—as the strongest nation on Earth—economically, militarily, and politically.

Our alliances are firm and reliable. Our military forces are strong and ready. Our economic power is unmatched. Along with other industrial democracies which are our friends, we lead the way in technological innovation. Our combined economies are more than three times as productive as those of the Soviet Union and all its allies. Our political institutions are based on human freedom. Our open system encourages individual initiative and creativity—and that, in turn, strengthens our entire society. Our values and our democratic way of life have a magnetic appeal for people all over the world which a materialistic and a totalitarian philosophy can never hope to challenge or to rival.

For all these reasons, we have a capacity for leadership in the world that surpasses that of any other nation.

That leadership imposes many responsibilities on us, on me as President, and on you, other leaders who shape opinion and the character of our country. But our noblest duty is to use our strength to serve our highest interest: the building of a secure, stable, and a peaceful world. We perform the duty in the spirit proclaimed by John F. Kennedy in 1963, the year he died: "Confident and unafraid," he said, "we labor on—not toward a strategy of annihilation but toward a strategy of peace."

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In our relations with the Soviet Union, the possibility of mutual annihilation makes a strategy of peace the only rational choice for both sides. Because our values are so different, it is clear that the United States of America and the Soviet Union will be in competition as far ahead as we can imagine or see.

Yet we have a common interest in survival, and we share a common recognition that our survival depends, in a real sense, on each other. The very competition between us makes it imperative that we bring under control its most dangerous aspect—the nuclear arms race. That is why the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) are so very important. This effort by two great nations to limit vital security forces is unique in human history. None have ever done this before.

As Congress and the American people consider the SALT treaty which is now nearly complete, the debate will center around four basic questions: Why do we need SALT? How is the treaty related to our overall defense strategy? Can Soviet compliance be verified? How does the treaty relate to Soviet activities which challenge us and challenge our interests?

Let me address each question in turn. First, why do we need a strategic arms limitation treaty?

Why We Need a SALT Treaty

We need it because it will contribute to a more peaceful world—and to our own national security.

Today, we and the Soviet Union, with sharply different world outlooks and interests, both have the ominous destructive power literally to destroy each other as a functioning society, killing tens of millions of people in the process. And common sense tells us—as it tells the Soviet Union—that we must work to make our competition less dangerous, less burdensome, and less likely to bring the ultimate horror of nuclear war. Indeed, the entire world has a vital interest in whether or not we control the strategic arms race.

We have consulted closely with our allies, who count on us not only to maintain strong military forces to offset Soviet military power but also, and equally important, to manage successfully a stable East-West relationship. SALT is at the heart of both these crucial efforts. That is why the leaders of France, Great Britain, Germany, Canada, and other nations have voiced their full support for the emerging treaty.

Some nations which have so far held back from building their own nuclear weapons—and at least a dozen other nations on Earth now have that capability—will be strongly influenced in their decision by whether the two nuclear superpowers will restrain our weapons. Rejection of the new strategic arms limitation treaty would seriously undermine the effort to control proliferation of these deadly weapons. And nothing, nothing, would more surely damage our other critical efforts in arms control—from a ban on all nuclear testing to the prevention of dangerous satellite warfare in space; from equalizing NATO and Warsaw Pact forces to restraining the spread of sophisticated conventional weapons on Earth.

Every President since the dawn of the nuclear age has pursued the effort to bring nuclear arms under control. And this must be a continuing process.

President Kennedy, building on the efforts of Presidents Truman and Eisenhower, signed the first agreement with the Soviet Union in 1963 to stop the poisonous testing of nuclear explosives in the atmosphere.

Five years later, under President Johnson, the United States and the Soviet Union joined other nations throughout the world in signing the Nonproliferation Treaty, an important step in preventing the spread of nuclear explosives to other nations.

In 1972, under President Nixon, the SALT I agreement placed the first agreed limit on the number of offensive weapons, and the Antiballistic Missile Treaty, the ABM Treaty, made an enduring contribution to our own security.

President Ford continued the negotiations at Helsinki and at Vladivostok. Each negotiation builds on the accomplishments of the last. Each agreement provides a foundation for further progress toward a more stable nuclear relationship.

Three Presidents have now spent more than 8 years negotiating the next step in this process—SALT II. We have all negotiated carefully and deliberately. Every step of the way, we have worked with our military leaders and other experts, and we have sought the advice and counsel of the Members of Congress.

An overwhelming majority of the American people recognize the need for SALT II. Our people want, and our people expect, continued step-by-step progress toward bringing nuclear weapons under control.

Americans will support a reasoned increase in our defense effort, but we do not want a wholly unnecessary return to the cold war and an all-out arms race with its vastly greater risks and costs. Through strength, we want world peace.

Let me turn to the second question. How is SALT II related to our overall defense strategy?

SALT II and Defense Strategy

The strategic forces of the United States and the Soviet Union today are essentially equivalent. They have larger and more numerous land-based missiles. We have a larger number of warheads and, as you know, significant technological and geographical advantages.

Each side has the will and the means to prevent the other from achieving superiority. Neither side is in a position to exploit its nuclear weapons for political purposes nor to use strategic weapons without facing almost certain suicide.

What causes us concern is not the current balance but the momentum of the Soviet strategic buildup. Over the past decade, the Soviets have steadily increased their real defense spending, year-by-year, while our own defense spending over that decade has had a net decrease.

In areas not limited by SALT I, they have launched ambitious programs to strengthen their strategic forces. At some future point, the Soviet Union could achieve a strategic advantage—unless we alter these trends. That is exactly what I want to do—with the support of the American people and the bipartisan support of Congress.

We must move on two fronts at the same time.

First, within mutually accepted limits, we must modernize our own strategic forces. Along with the strengthening of NATO, that is a central purpose of the increased Defense budget that I have submitted to Congress—improvements which are necessary even in a time of fiscal restraint.

And **second**, we must place more stringent limits on the arms race than are presently imposed by SALT I. That is the purpose of the SALT II treaty.

The Defense budget I have submitted will insure that our nuclear force continues to be essentially equivalent to that of the Soviet Union.

This year we have begun to equip our submarines with new, more powerful and longer range Trident I missiles. Next year, the first of our new even more secure Trident submarines will be going to sea, and we are working on a more powerful and accurate Trident II missile for these submarines.

Our cruise missile program will greatly enhance the effectiveness of our long-range bomber force. These missiles will be able to penetrate any air defense system which the Soviet Union could build in the foreseeable future.

We are substantially improving the accuracy and the power of our land-based Minuteman missiles. But in the coming decade, missiles of this type based in fixed silos will become increasingly vulnerable to surprise attack. The Soviets have three-quarters of their warheads in such fixed-based missiles, compared to only one-quarter of ours. Nevertheless, this is a very serious problem, and we must deal with it effectively and sensibly.

The Defense Department now has under consideration a number of options for responding to this problem, including making some of our own intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM's mobile. I might add—and this is very important—that the options which we are evaluating would be far more costly, and we would have far less confidence of their effectiveness, in the absence of SALT II limits. For without these limits on the number of Soviet warheads, the Soviet Union could counter any effort we made simply by greatly increasing the number of warheads on their missiles.

Let me emphasize that the SALT II agreement preserves adequate flexibility for the United States in this important area.

Our strategic forces must be able to survive any attack and to counterattack military and civilian targets in the aggressor nation. And the aggressor nation must know that we have the ability and the will to exercise this option if they should attack us. We have had this capacity—which is the essence of deterrence—in the past; we have it today; and SALT II, plus the defense programs that I have described, will insure that we have it for the future.

The SALT II agreement will slow the growth of Soviet arms and limit the strategic competition, and by helping to define future threats that we might face, SALT II will make our defense planning much more effective.

Under the agreement, the two sides will be limited to equal numbers of strategic launchers for the first time, ending the substantial Soviet numerical advantage which was permitted in the currently effective SALT I treaty.

To reach these new and lower levels, the Soviets will have to reduce their overall number of strategic delivery systems by 10%—more than 250 Soviet missile launchers or bombers will have to be dismantled. Naturally, the Soviets will choose to phase out their older systems, but these systems are still formidable.

The missiles, for instance, to be torn down are comparable in age and payload to our Minuteman II missiles and to our Polaris missiles presently deployed. Under the agreement, they will not be permitted to replace these dismantled systems with modern ones. Our own operational forces have been kept somewhat below the permitted ceiling. Thus, under the agreement, we could increase our force level, if necessary.

SALT II will also impose the first limited but important restraints on the race to build new systems and to improve existing ones—the so-called qualitative arms race.

In short, SALT II places serious limits on what the Soviets might do in the absence of such an agreement. For example, without SALT II, the Soviet Union could build up to some 3,000 strategic systems by 1985. With SALT II, we will both be limited to 2,250 such weapons.

This new arms control agreement will, obviously, serve our national interests. It will reduce the dangerous levels of strategic arms and restrain the development of future weapons. It will help to maintain our relative strength compared to the Soviets. It will avert a costly, risky, and pointless buildup of missile launchers and bombers—at the end of which both sides would be even less secure.

Let me turn now to the third of the four questions. How can we know when the Soviets are living up to their obligations under this SALT agreement?

Verification

No objective, no objective, has commanded more energy and attention in our negotiations. We have insisted that the SALT II agreement be made verifiable. We are confident that no significant violation of the treaty could take place without the United States detecting it.

Our confidence in the verifiability of the agreement derives from the size and nature of activities we must monitor and the many effective and sophisticated intelligence collection systems which we in America possess.

For example, nuclear submarines take several years to construct and assemble. Missile silos and their supportive equipment are quite large and visible. Intercontinental bombers are built at a few plants, and they need major airfields. Our photo-reconnaissance satellites survey the entire Soviet Union on a regular basis, they give us high confidence that we will be able to count accurately the numbers of all these systems.

But our independent verification capabilities are not limits only to observing these large-scale activities. We can determine not only how many systems there are but what they can do. Our photographic satellites and other systems enable us to follow technological developments in Soviet strategic forces with great accuracy. There is no question that any cheating which might affect our national security would be discovered in time for us to respond fully.

For many years we have monitored Soviet strategic forces and Soviet compliance with the SALT agreements with a high degree of confidence. The overall capability remains. It was certainly not lost with our observation stations in Iran, which was only one of many intelligence sources that we use to follow Soviet strategic activities. We are concerned with that loss, but we must keep it in perspective.

This monitoring capability relates principally to the portion of the new agreement dealing with the modernization limits on ICBM's and to only a portion of such modernization restraints.

The sensitive intelligence techniques obviously cannot be disclosed in public, but the bottom line is that if there is an effort to cheat on the SALT agreement—including the limits on modernizing ICBM's—we will detect it, and we will do so in time fully to protect our security.

We must also keep in mind that quite apart from SALT limits, our security is affected by the extent of our information about Soviet strategic forces. With this SALT II treaty, that vital information will be much more accessible to us.

The agreement specifically forbids, for the first time, interference with the systems used for monitoring compliance and prohibits any deliberate concealment that would impede verification. Any concealment activity would itself be detectable, and a violation of this part of the agreement would be so serious as to give us grounds to cancel the treaty itself.

As I have said many times, the stakes are too high to rely on trust, or even on the Soviets rational inclination to act in their own best interest. The treaty must—and the treaty will be—verifiable from the first day it is signed.

And, finally, how does SALT II fit into the context of our overall relations with the Soviet Union?

SALT II and Overall Relations With the U.S.S.R.

Because SALT II will make the world safer and our own nation more secure, it is in our national interest to control nuclear weapons even as we compete with the Soviets elsewhere in the world. A SALT II agreement in no way limits our ability to promote our interests or to answer Soviet threats to those interests.

We will continue to support the independence of Third World nations which struggle to stay free. We will continue to promote the peaceful resolution of local and regional disputes and to oppose efforts by any others to inflame these disputes with outside force. And we will continue to work for human rights.

It is a delusion to believe that rejection of a SALT treaty would somehow induce the Soviet Union to exercise new restraints in troubled areas.

The actual effect or rejecting such a treaty might be precisely the opposite. The most intransient and hostile elements of a Soviet political power structure would certainly be encouraged and strengthened by our rejection of a SALT agreement. The Soviets might very well feel that they then have little to lose by creating new international tensions.

A rejection of SALT II would have significance far beyond the fate of a single treaty. It would mean a radical turning away from America's longtime policy of seeking world peace.

We would no longer be identified as the peace-loving nation. It would turn us away from the control of nuclear weapons and from the easing of tensions between Americans and the Soviet people under the system of international law based on mutual interests.

The rejection of SALT II would result in a more perilous world. As I said at Georgia Tech on February 20:

> Each crisis, each confrontation, each point of friction—as serious as it may be in its own right—will take on an added measure of significance and an added dimension of danger for it would occur in an atmosphere of unbridled strategic competition and deteriorating strategic stability. It is precisely because we have fundamental differences with the Soviet Union that we are determined to bring this most dangerous dimension of our military competition under control.

For these reasons, we will not try to impose binding linkage between Soviet behavior and SALT, and we will not accept any Soviet attempts to link SALT with aspects of our own foreign policy of which they may disapprove.

Again, SALT II is not a favor we are doing for the Soviet Union. It is an agreement carefully negotiated in the national security interests of the United States of America.

I put these issues to you today because they need discussion and debate, and because the voices of the American people must be heard.

In the months ahead, we will do all in our power to explain the treaty clearly and fully to the American people. I know that Members of Congress from both parties will join in this effort to insure an informed public debate. And you, more than any other group I can imagine in the United States, share this responsibility with me and with the Congress.

During this debate, it is important that we exercise care. We will be sharing with the Congress some of our most sensitive defense and intelligence secrets. And the leaders in Congress must insure that these secrets will be guarded so that the debate itself will not undermine our own security.

As the national discussion takes place, let us be clear about what the issues are and are not.

Americans are committed to maintaining a strong defense. That is not the issue.

We will continue to compete—and compete effectively—with the Soviet Union. That is not the issue.

The issue is whether we will move ahead with strategic arms control or resume a relentless nuclear weapons competition. That is the choice we face—between an imperfect world with a SALT agreement or an imperfect and more dangerous world without a SALT agreement.

With SALT II, we will have:

- The foundation for further controls on nuclear and conventional arms;
- Far greater certainty in our defense planning and in the knowledge of the threats that we might face;
- Flexibility to meet our own defense needs;
- Our own self-respect and the earned respect of the world for a United States demonstrably committed to the works of peace; and
- Reductions in Soviet strategic forces.

Without SALT, the Soviets will be unconstrained and capable of—and probably committed to—an enormous further buildup.

Without SALT, there would have to be a much sharper rise in our own defense spending, at the expense of other necessary programs for our people.

Without SALT, we would end up with thousands more strategic nuclear warheads on both sides, with far greater costs—and far less security—for our citizens.

Without SALT, we would see improved relations with the Soviet Union replaced by heightened tensions.

Without SALT, the long slow process of arms control—so central to building a safer world—would be dealt a crippling, and perhaps a fatal, blow.

Without SALT, the world would be forced to conclude that America had chosen confrontation rather than cooperation and peace. This is an inescapable choice we face. For the fact is that the alternative to this treaty is not some perfect agreement drafted unilaterally by the United States in which we gain everything and the Soviets gain nothing. The alternative now, and in the foreseeable future, is no agreement at all.

I am convinced that the United States has a moral and a political will to control the relentless technology which could constantly devise new and more destructive weapons to kill human beings. We need not drift into a dark nightmare of unrestrained arms competition. We Americans have the wisdom to know that our security depends on more than just maintaining our unsurpassed defense forces. Our security and that of our allies also depend on the strength of ideas and ideals and on arms control measures that can stabilize and finally reverse a dangerous and a wasteful arms race which neither side can win. This is the path of wisdom. This is the path of peace.

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